



Press Release

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**Presidential Task Force on Children's Environmental Health and Safety Meets
*HUD Announces \$67 Million in Grants to Fight Childhood Lead Poisoning***

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The executive leadership of a presidential task force on children's environmental health and safety today held its first meeting under the Bush Administration- and the first since reauthorization of the task force. The task force is charged with reviewing environmental and safety threats to children's health, evaluating the effectiveness of programs to address these threats, and making recommendations for improvements.

The executive leadership of the task force met to discuss the importance of coordinated efforts among federal agencies in dealing with lead poisoning, asthma, unintentional injuries and other environmental health and safety hazards to the nation's children.

"The Bush Administration is committed to protecting America's kids," said Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Christie Whitman. "Childhood lead poisoning remains one of the greatest environmental health risks facing children in industrialized countries today. We are very focused on helping communities address this problem."

"Good health early in life is critical to good health throughout life," added Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson. "Therefore, all of us who care about children must recommit ourselves to working together to assure this goal. HHS is

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pleased to be leading this effort with the EPA, and we look forward to working with all of our federal partners. America's children have never been healthier, but we must always strive to do better, particularly for disadvantaged populations."

At a media availability after the task force meeting, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez announced \$59 million in Lead Hazard Control Grants and an additional \$8 million in grants under HUD's Healthy Home Program.

"No child should be denied the opportunity to grow up in a safe and healthy home because of circumstance," said Secretary Martinez. "These grants are an investment in our children so that they can realize their full potential. This is a top priority for my department and this Administration. There are a lot of good ideas out there for addressing this problem creatively, through public-private partnerships. We want to foster those ideas and opportunities."

The task force is co-chaired by the EPA Administrator and the Secretary Health and Human Services, and includes fourteen other cabinet departments and White House agencies.

Attached is the White House fact sheet on the interagency task force.

FACT SHEET: CHILDREN'S HEALTH MONTH

- October is Children's Health Month. On October 24, at the direction of President George W. Bush, an interagency Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children convened to review environmental threats to children's health, evaluate the effectiveness of programs to address these threats, and make recommendations for improvements.
- As part of this effort to reduce the health risks to millions of children, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will award more than \$67 million in grants to 21 states to fund programs to eliminate lead hazards in low-income housing, promote educational programs and conduct research.

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH

- The Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children was originally created by Executive Order in 1997. President Bush signed an Executive Order on October 9 that extends the work of the Task Force by another 18 months. Over the course of the next year and a half, the Task Force will evaluate existing programs and develop innovative policies and programs to address a number of environmental and safety hazards facing America's children. Its first priorities will be to examine programs that combat childhood lead poisoning and the increased incidence of asthma.
- The Task Force met on October 24. It was co-chaired by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and includes fourteen other Cabinet departments and White House agencies.

REDUCING LEAD EXPOSURE BY CHILDREN

- The Task Force's top priority will be reducing lead poisoning among children. Almost one million American children under the age of six (roughly four percent of children in that age group) have dangerously high levels of lead in their blood, making lead poisoning one of the most widespread childhood diseases. This problem is most severe among families that live in older housing units: Sixteen percent of low-income children - and 21 percent of African American children - who live in older housing have elevated lead levels.
- In 1978, 14.8 million American children suffered from lead poisoning in the U.S. Since then, children's blood lead levels have declined more than 80 percent due to the elimination of lead from house paint, gasoline, and food and beverage cans. Lead has also been significantly reduced in industrial emissions, drinking water, consumer goods, hazardous wastes sites and other sources. But 27 percent of the

nation's housing units (25.5 million units) still contain lead paint hazards. Addressing this hazard is a top priority for the Task Force and the Bush Administration.

- The most common cause of lead exposure for young children is lead paint in older housing. HHS, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and EPA all have effective programs to reduce children's exposure to lead, and America is making great progress in this effort in the last twenty years.
- The HUD grants announced today will provide \$59 million dollars in Lead Hazard Control grants to cities, states and counties to eliminate lead paint hazards in low-income privately-owned housing. These grants are expected to fund the removal of lead hazards from approximately 7,000 privately owned homes in 16 states. An additional \$8 million in grants will fund local projects under HUD's Healthy Homes Program to address a multitude of health hazards relating to housing, and support programs to develop new methods for assessing and controlling home health hazards.
- HUD also provides millions more in federal funding to fight lead poisoning through public housing and other block grant funding to control lead hazards in federally assisted housing. The Bush Administration requested \$110 million in the FY02 HUD budget to continue the work of removing lead and other health and safety hazards from low-income housing. Funding for the Lead Hazards Control grant program has been increased by 50% over FY01 funding.
- Although HUD will spearhead Administration efforts to reduce children's exposure to lead paint in housing, the Task Force will oversee a coordinated, multi-agency effort to address this problem. HHS and EPA will play important roles in this initiative.
- The Centers for Disease Control's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program provides more than \$31 million to 60 state and local health departments to assist in focusing screening and case management efforts on children who are at greatest risk of lead poisoning. CDC spends another \$11 million annually to develop technical support to states' lead poisoning control efforts.
- EPA spends \$7 million annually on enforcing and ensuring compliance with lead hazard reduction regulations and on public education.

RESPONDING TO THE RISE IN ASTHMA CASES

- The number of children diagnosed with asthma has more than doubled in the past twenty years. As many as 10 million school days may be missed due to asthma-related illnesses each year. The Task Force will coordinate and oversee ongoing federal research projects designed to investigate the causes of childhood asthma. The Task Force will also oversee monitoring efforts designed to obtain more accurate information about the prevalence of childhood asthma at state, regional and local levels.
- Current federal efforts to address childhood asthma include an “Action Against Asthma” strategic plan developed by HHS. This plan focuses on the priorities of determining the causes of asthma, reducing the burden of asthma for people with the disease, eliminating the disproportionate health burden of asthma in minority populations and those living in poverty, and tracking the disease and assessing the effectiveness of asthma programs.
- HHS is funding asthma control programs operated by 25 state health departments. EPA has also recently issued a “Tools for Schools” kit to improve indoor air quality in schools.
- While there is still work to be done in areas like asthma and childhood lead poisoning, the health of America’s children has shown some very positive trends in recent years. In July, the federal government issued its second annual report on the health of America’s 70 million children, “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.” Among the report’s key findings: a majority of parents reported their children are in very good or excellent health; fewer young children and adolescents are dying; and 77 percent of toddlers are up-to-date on their immunizations. The poverty rate for children in families has dropped to its lowest rate in 20 years, and teenage birth rates declined by one-fourth in the 1990s.

OTHER ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CHILDREN’S HEALTH

- HHS is leading a 10-year action plan to achieve community-based service systems for children with special health care needs and their families. EPA has partnered with the Girl Scouts of the USA to establish an environmental health badge program. EPA is also increasing efforts to raise public awareness on childhood asthma and the effects of secondhand tobacco smoke on children.
- HHS recently announced \$10 million in grants to improve treatment and services for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events. Later this month, EPA and HHS will announce the opening of several new pediatric research centers across the country that will focus on developmental disorders and their relationship to environmental exposures.

LEADERSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Christine Todd Whitman, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency

Tommy Thompson, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services

John Ashcroft, Attorney General, Department of Justice

Ann M. Veneman, Secretary, Department of Agriculture

Elaine L. Chao, Secretary, Department of Labor

Mel Martinez, Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development

Norman Y. Mineta, Secretary, Department of Transportation

Spencer Abraham, Secretary, Department of Energy

Rod Paige, Secretary, Department of Education

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., Director, Office of Management and Budget

Larry Lindsey, Director, National Economic Council

R. Glenn Hubbard, Chair, Council of Economic Advisors

James Connaughton, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

John H. Marburger, III, Assistant to the President, Office of Science and Technology
Policy

Ann Brown, Chair, Consumer Product Safety Commission

John Bridgeland, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy
Council